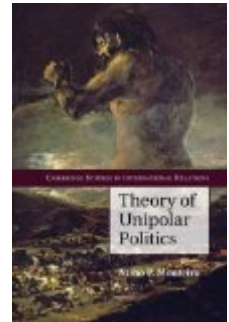


Nuno P. Monteiro. *Theory of Unipolar Politics*. Cambridge Studies in International Relations Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xiv + 272 pp. \$28.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-107-67775-3.



Reviewed by David H. Sacko

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Nuno P. Monteiro's *Theory of Unipolar Politics* represents the latest systematic account of unipolarity and its effects on world politics. Monteiro addresses the durability and likelihood of peace for the current unipolar period and offers a strategy for the United States to maintain not only its military advantage but also the unipolarity of the international system. The author purports that the unipolar period will likely be durable so long as the unipole, the United States, continues to facilitate the economic growth of other major powers, notably China, thereby reducing China's incentives for further militarization. Furthermore, Monteiro holds that the United States should adopt a strategy of defensive accommodation and desist from extending its military reach into China's regional concerns. As long as the United States does not attempt to contain China and allows China to exercise regional power, China will not fundamentally contest the international order. This strategic recommendation attempts to maintain the international status quo with a strategy that is primarily economic, not military,

in means. Finally, Monteiro argues that the unipolar world, while stable, is fundamentally conflict prone, in contrast to William C. Wohlforth's articles "Stability of a Unipolar World" and "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," as well as Thomas S. Mowle and my book *The Unipolar World: An Unbalanced Future*.^[1]

The symmetry of this book's title with Kenneth N. Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* foreshadows the systemic nature of Monteiro's work, a definite strength. Too much of contemporary analytic world politics or security studies work ignores the operation of the international system. Systemic theory gives us a sense of how interactions are conditioned by power.^[2] Monteiro presents a theory of the system and the strategic exigencies from unipolarity—representing the best integration of systemic attributes and strategic analysis. Systemic analysis describes the limits strategic decision makers must face. Monteiro demonstrates how the problems and possibilities created by unipolarity are best addressed

with a strategy that maintains the status quo, without exasperating any existing rivalry.

Monteiro's core assertion that unipolarity is likely to be stable (in a systemic sense) yet conflict-prone presents a certain puzzle to which I had hoped he would bring greater resolution, given that interstate conflict remains the most likely source of systemic instability. *Theory of Unipolar Politics* certainly expands the field's current thinking on unipolarity's effects on international politics, yet the most concrete hypothesis raised by Monteiro, namely, that unipolar systems are inherently conflictual, remains fundamentally untested with only a presentation of nonrandom anecdotal evidence. Mowle and I present systematic evidence that unipolar systems are more *peaceful* (defined in terms of disputes and wars) yet Monteiro provides only the most meager of empirical evidence (no inferential statistics). Security studies, with its emphasis on the classical historical approach, and conflict processes, with its emphasis on quantification and systematic methodology, have long been converging: a trend that is good for both subdisciplines. *Theory of Unipolar Politics* would have benefited greatly from considering how unipolar systems *empirically* vary from other systemic configurations of power. Still, Monteiro's *Theory of Unipolar Politics* integrates the very best contemporary literature on unipolar politics and presents a new theory that, while controversial, is certainly worth strongly considering.

Notes

[1]. William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 5-41; William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 28-57; and Thomas S. Mowle and David H. Sacko, *The Unipolar World: An Unbalanced Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[2]. The relevant theoretical traditions associating power in the international system are neo-

realism (Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* [Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979]); hegemonic stability theory (Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981]), and world systems theory (Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* [London: Verso, 1983]).

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